

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC023646
Inspector	David Putnam
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Registered person	Acorn Homes (UK) Limited
Registered person address	424 Margate Road Westwood Ramsgate Kent CT12 6SJ
Responsible individual	David Laurie Knowles
Registered manager	Tiffany Jane Healy
Date of last inspection	04/03/2014

Inspection date	06/01/2015
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Previous inspection	satisfactory progress
Enforcement action since last inspection	One compliance, investigation and enforcement case has been opened since the last inspection. An anonymous allegation was made in relation to the organisation. Ofsted met with senior managers and was satisfied with their response. No further action was considered necessary.

This inspection	
Overall effectiveness	good
Outcomes for children and young people	good
Quality of care	adequate
Keeping children and young people safe	good
Leadership and management	good

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome	good
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Children and young people recognise the genuine and demonstrable improvements they make as a result of living in this home. The consistent quality of care they receive from a committed and compassionate team of staff enables them to feel settled after significant periods of disruption in their lives. The quality of relationships between children, young people and staff is a significant strength of the service. This contributes to a strong sense of safety and well-being experienced by children and young people.

The views and opinions of children and young people are actively sought and positively represented, helping individuals feel valued and respected. Children and young people make positive choices that ultimately result in a reduction in risk taking behaviours. They are helped to feel part of the local community where they

live enabling them to develop a sense of belonging.

An experienced, qualified and well established Registered Manager is now effectively assisted by two deputies within the home along with senior and support staff in the organisation's head office. These recent changes enable the Registered Manager to take a more strategic overview of the service. A commitment to drive improvement is apparent. Monitoring of the service is good, leading to a sound understanding of areas of strength and those needing further development.

A requirement is made to ensure that the performance of all staff is appraised annually. Recommendations are made to; ensure that care plans are produced promptly and are of sufficient standard and quality; provide an environment that further promotes children and young people's education; improve the décor and presentation of the home; and to enhance the training programme.

Full report

Information about this children's home

This children's home is privately run. It is registered to accommodate and provide care for up to 8 young people with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
04/03/2014	Interim	satisfactory progress
17/10/2013	Full	good
26/02/2013	Interim	satisfactory progress
01/08/2012	Full	adequate

What does the children's home need to do to improve further?

Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
27 (2001)	ensure that all persons employed by him receive appropriate appraisal. (Regulation 27(4)(a))	28/02/2015

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the service should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure staff meet children's individual needs as set out in the child's placement plan taking into account where appropriate their relationship with the wider group of children (NMS 2.3)
- ensure that children have a home which promotes a learning environment

and supports their development (NMS 8.1)

- ensure that the home provides a comfortable and homely environment and is well maintained and decorated (NMS 10.3)
- provide a good quality learning and development programme which staff are supported to undertake; in particular that training relating to equality and diversity is consistently provided and regularly updated. (NMS 18.1)

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for children and young people **good**

Through their openness and candour children and young people express how they feel their lives have progressed since living in this home. They identify genuine changes in their lives as a direct result of the care they receive. When asked to provide more detail one immediately said, 'education, behaviour, attitude; everything has changed since I've been here.' Other children and young people identify that they are helped to manage their anger. They speak positively about reward systems that promote positive behaviours. Children and young people describe how they are helped to take responsibility for their actions and make more positive personal choices. They go on to identify how a range of their behaviours improve over time.

Some young people speak about learning from mistakes when choosing friends. They now form positive friendships with others who share their passion and interest in the courses they undertake at college. They are more careful about with whom they spend time, resulting in a reduction in potentially risk taking behaviours.

Placing social workers describe seeing positive outcomes for children and young people as they become more settled. They say that children and young people openly communicate with staff as they become more confident. Some identify that children and young people are now more actively engaged in education when they have been out of school for several months prior to coming to live in the home.

Outcomes for those who have moved on from the home since the last inspection have also been positive. All moves have been planned with the views of children and young people consistently contributing to the planning process. This helps children and young people to understand that their opinions are valued. This message is instilled in children and young people throughout their time in the home. Staff ensure children and young people are consulted frequently. Consequently, they have significant influence upon day-to-day events within their home as well as more fundamental developments. For example, children and young people informed the inspector that, at their suggestion, managers and staff had changed the use of rooms within the home to create a second sitting room or games room.

Children and young people enjoy and benefit from a range of activities in the local area. They take up hobbies and interests that develop new skills and help to keep them fit and healthy. Some children and young people choose to contribute to a national charity demonstrating social conscience and responsibility for others in need.

Children and young people benefit from positive experiences of contact with family members when this is safe and appropriate. Placing social workers confirm that the close work staff undertake with them ensures prompt and effective responses that identify and meet the needs of children and young people in this regard. One said

that 'staff are flexible and responsive in providing significant support with contact.'

Quality of care

adequate

The quality of relationships between the staff and the children and young people is a key strength of this home. Throughout the inspection, the inspector consistently observed positive and caring interactions between staff, children and young people. The calm response and demeanour of staff to any rude or challenging language or behaviours provides a model for children and young people to follow. This helps them understand and learn how to interact with each other.

Children and young people highlight the importance of key working. They gain particular benefit from the quality of these individual relationships even though they get on with all staff. The Registered Manager plays a pivotal role in the home and is available and accessible to children and young people. They see her as a fundamental source of advice and support. A social worker said of one young person, 'he will listen to [the Registered Manager] more than any other person in the world.'

One young person simply said, 'I like it.' Another commented, 'It's good here.' They identify that 'in this home there is lots of places to go when you need to. You can find space for yourself.' One social worker said, 'I couldn't ask for more', adding 'I feel she is the happiest she has been in care.' An independent reviewing officer for one young person identified that they had been able to experience a period of stability in this home after significant and frequent change.

Children, young people and staff follow a policy of shopping locally to the home, rather than in large out of town superstores. Children and young people walk with staff to buy everyday items such as meat and vegetables. Young people confirm that they enjoy doing this. This provides children and young people with the opportunity to understand what things cost and develop skills in this aspect of independence. Equally children and young people are able to engage with and support the local community where they live.

Medication practices are sound and clearly followed. This helps to keep children and young people safe while ensuring that their individual health needs are met.

Staff at all levels of the organisation demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of the children and young people themselves and the behaviours they display. However, the inspector found that some care plans lack detail. This is particularly the case when new children come to live at the home. Managers and staff do not consistently or efficiently utilise referral information to formulate clear plans from the outset of placements. Delays in producing such documents result in staff not always

being clear how to meet specific or individual needs.

In other areas of written communication there is openness in sharing of information with children and young people. Positive practice provides children and young people with the opportunity to engage with all aspects of their care and contribute to reports about them. Daily records and weekly summaries are shown to children and young people, who are encouraged to add their own thoughts, comments or reflections.

All children and young people are in receipt of some education, but this does not always meet the minimum expected standard of 25 hours each week. Staff advocate strongly for children and young people to receive provision that will meet their needs. However, there is currently insufficient rigour in setting clear routines for all children and young people. Expectations that children and young people will engage in structured activities at times when they are not able to be in full time education are not consistently communicated. As a result, they are not effectively prepared to transition back into full time education when the opportunity arises.

Accommodation in the home is adequate. There are a sufficient number of rooms providing space for the children and young people living there. However, many areas of the home appear dark and gloomy. The décor appears tired in places meaning that different areas of the home do not present a homely, warm or nurturing environment.

Keeping children and young people safe good

Managers and staff demonstrate a sound understanding of the risks of exploitation brought about by the vulnerability of specific children and young people. Staff take action to share concerns with children and young people and pro-actively seek appropriate support from external agencies. When required, leaders and managers fund additional services from specialist workers. This helps young people to understand risks and leads to them making positive decisions to reduce risk taking behaviours. As a direct result incidences of children and young people going missing reduce dramatically over time. At the point of this inspection no instances had occurred for more than a month. Staff from placing authorities confirm this is the case. They state clearly that 'this is a safe place.' They cite examples where young people have stopped going missing when this used to happen with worrying regularity. This leads social workers to say that 'the prognosis is better than before.'

Managers and staff take their responsibility to safeguard children, young people and others extremely seriously. Individual needs and risks are fully understood. Measures taken to address risk are discussed and agreed with placing authorities to ensure that responsibilities are effectively shared.

Children and young people are clear that there are ample opportunities for them to express their views. They know about the complaints process but generally go

directly to staff with issues that are promptly addressed and resolved. A health and wellbeing team within the wider organisation provides the opportunity to access to different therapeutic services when appropriate. These, and the overarching ethos of care, lead children and young people to consistently and confidently say that they feel comfortable and safe in their home.

Policies are consistently reviewed to ensure that practice is up to date. For example the organisation has recently updated their procedure for safeguarding children and young people at risk of sexual abuse and exploitation. This ensures that safeguarding practice is up-to-date and utilises resources available from key safeguarding agencies, including the local Safeguarding Children Board. Training on child sexual exploitation has been delivered to senior staff and is scheduled to be rolled out to all employees in the coming weeks.

While restraint is used, this is only ever as a last resort and is always in line with the regulatory framework. Robust recording allows for thorough monitoring of all restraints and sanctions. This has led to a reduction in frequency over time. The figures provided to the inspector were emphasised by the experience of one young person who said that while they had been restrained in the past they could not recall the last time this had happened.

Leadership and management

good

A committed and experienced Registered Manager effectively leads an established staff team. This contributes to the experience of continuity and consistency children and young people have. Recent changes within the home have led to the creation of two deputy manager posts. Both appointees competently informed this inspection while the Registered Manager was on annual leave. Senior leaders in the organisation provide effective support to the home and are seen as accessible by individual staff. Pro-active communication from leaders and managers in the home and the wider organisation helps to build positive working relationships with external agencies. Significant events are promptly notified to Ofsted and other external bodies.

Detailed monitoring of the service helps leaders and managers build a clear understanding of the areas of strength in the home, along with aspects of the home that need to improve. These are formulated into plans for developing the service that draw upon the views of a range of stakeholders.

Leaders and managers respond positively to requirements and recommendations raised through the inspection process. Since the last inspection clear action has been taken to enhance the referrals process. The Registered Manager now has the final say in whether a child or young person is admitted. When they are on leave decisions are put on hold until they return. Senior managers in the organisation are fully aware of this practice and rigidly adhere to it. This ensures that only appropriate referrals are accepted. The needs of children and young people already living in the home are

now more effectively considered as part of the admissions process.

This improved admissions process indirectly influences the circumstances in which children and young people move on from the home. All those who have left the home since the last inspection have done so in a planned way. Close work with placing authorities ensures that the views of children and young people are sought and considered in decision making. For some this has meant returning to their families. Others are found placements closer to home and the communities they know.

Staff benefit from good quality supervision in line with the organisation's policy. This enables them to reflect upon their practice and be challenged to improve the quality of service provided to children and young people. However, development opportunities are not effectively linked to a formal appraisal process. Only a limited number of staff have had their performance appraised in the past year. For one administrative member of staff this process has not occurred for over three years.

However, children and young people are cared for by a well-qualified staff team. All are supported to complete the recognised level three diploma. Most either have, or are working towards achieving this. Only those still undergoing a probationary period have not yet been enrolled. The organisation has established positive links with external training providers, resulting in a comprehensive training programme. Nevertheless, the inspector identified that training relating to equality and diversity has not been promoted for all staff in recent years. A recommendation is made to enhance the training of staff accordingly.

Comprehensive recording systems provide a clear overview of young people's time living in the home. Records describe events and illustrate the changes young people make over time. Placing social workers describe reports as 'brilliant' and confirm that weekly updates are consistently forwarded to them.

What inspection judgements mean

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Good	A service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements.
Adequate	A service that only meets minimum requirements.
Inadequate	A service that does not meet minimum requirements.

Information about this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the framework of inspection for children's homes.